A Pattern for the Church

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Among the many individuals and groups who are seeking to see the Lord restore fully His divine plan and order for the church there is a constant need for self examination and prayer that our hearts may be constantly open to the revelation of His Spirit in this hour. There is great danger in coming to the place where a person or group feels that they "have the answer" to all the questions concerning the Lord's pattern for His church and close themselves to further revelation. I have read much from different authors and have sought the Lord much in His Word that I might know His perfect plan and will for this time in human history when we are facing the consummation of all things.

Recently I was meditating in the presence of the Lord and was suddenly made aware of an important "clue" which I believe will unlock some of the questions concerning the Lord's pattern for His church in this end time. Generally speaking most of those who are "moving on" in that which the Lord is revealing in this hour are convinced that the church must be restored according to the "pattern" laid down in the New Testament. Most men and groups who see this "vision" refer variously to the "New Testament Church," "New Testament Pattern" etc. to indicate their belief and desire to see the apostolic pattern of the church restored in this day. Much emphasis is put on the "pattern" which is seen in the book of Acts as well as in the writings of the apostle Paul.

Let us say at the outset that there is a great difference between knowing a "pattern" and seeing that pattern actually fulfilled in experience. The apostle Paul was given the revelation concerning the church apart from any human instrumentality. An embryonic form of the life and nature of this church is reflected in His writings to the various churches. But did Paul ever see that which was revealed to him come to its mature state? This is the crux of a very important clue which the Lord is now making known. If Paul did not, neither those who followed after him, then **we have no complete example** in the book of Acts or any other place in the New Testament of how a **fully matured church** should function! We must realize that the church as God has purposed **never came to fullness in the days of the apostles or after**, nor has it yet come to its fullness. This simply means that we have **no absolute pattern** (as far as the "letter" is concerned), neither a complete example of a church functioning as God wants it in its fullness. We can say that we have a basic or "embryonic" pattern in the writings of Paul, and a partial example in the book of Acts. But to draw absolute and final conclusions concerning how the church should function today from these New Testament "patterns" is not possible.

How then can we lead into that perfect life and order which the Lord certainly wants for His church today? There is no other way than **by revelation of the spirit** to those the Lord has chosen to bring about the restoration of His church - the present day apostolic and prophetic ministry. To say that the Lord could reveal His mind to Paul and other apostles in that day and not reveal His mind to those chosen in this day is to limit the sovereignty of the Lord over His church and limit the guiding power of the Holy Spirit. An apostolic and prophetic ministry submitting themselves completely to the mind of the Spirit and to the authority of Christ is the only answer to the restoration of the New Testament church in this day. By this, I do not mean that what the Lord is revealing will in any way contradict that which He has made known to us in both the "letter" and example of the church in the New Testament. But a further revelation is needed in this hour to amplify, clarify and further develop that which we have in the New Testament. In other words the church of today must have a "living word" and "living revelation" from a "living Lord" who is the Head of His Church in this day that that which is seen in its infancy and immaturity in the New Testament **may come into its maturity and fullness in this day**.

Before going further, let me say that I believe we must first go to the New Testament and get our foundational principles and sense of direction before we can go further in the

understanding of the Lord's will for His church. What is basic and foundational is always so. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid which is Christ Jesus." Has not Paul given us both a foundation and basic view of the "church which is His body" in Ephesians 4:1-16. Here he presents both the means and the goal of that which is to come forth in His fullness. We see men who are "gifts" to the church to bring that church into its perfection. Until we come into the "fullness of His stature" there must be a divinely called and ordained ministry to minister His will to the Body and to cause the Body to "grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ." The restoration of the divine Ministry must come first. Without this ministry, the Body of Christ cannot be perfected. There is what I consider a very shortsighted viewpoint among some groups today who are seeking to see the "Body of Christ" come together in God's divine order. They somehow feel that the "Body" can be perfected by just getting together and letting each contribute what they can in sort of a "Body Ministry" without the benefit of **divine ministry**. Certainly we desire to see the Body edified and ministered to by all of the members according to the capacity that God has given according to His gifts of grace (Rom. 12, 1 Pet.), and by means of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12). But Paul makes it clear in Ephesians 4:11-12 that the ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are needed "for the perfecting (equipping) of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Without the restoration of the divinely called and ordained ministry, functioning according to God's divine order by the leading of His Spirit unto all the congregations of the saints, there can be no restoration of the New Testament church nor the bringing of the church to its full maturity and perfection.

Now we come to the question as to how this Ministry should function. Again let me say that we do not have a complete pattern in the New Testament as far as **example** is concerned. We see the church in the process of growth and development, but we never see that church fully matured. Before the church could fully come into God's perfect order we find an apostasy setting in which eventually led the church into spiritual captivity before it came to maturity. For this reason we find the development process cut short. In the New Testament we find that the ministry of apostles and prophets was basic and foundational and came first. We read much about the ministry of apostles, some concerning prophets, and much less about evangelists, pastors and teachers. As a matter of fact we read nothing about pastors except that they are listed by Paul in Ephesians 4:11.

This has led some, who are looking for a perfect pattern in the New Testament, to conclude that "pastors" are either synonymous with "local" elders (which we will discuss in another article), or that the pastors and teachers are the same ministry, since teachers are mentioned in Acts. Could the answer to our problem be at the very point which we mentioned at the beginning as an important clue? What is it? Is it not that we see a developmental process in the records of the New Testament, but that that the full development was cut short by increasing apostasy? With this in mind, we see coming forth at the first the ministry of apostles and the beginnings of the ministries of prophets, and evangelists, but of pastors and teachers we read very little, because the call and development of these ministries which was to follow the others in the developmental process did not fully come forth!! Apostasy set in so quickly and the work of the Spirit was greatly hindered in calling and bringing forth a matured ministry; and for lack of this matured ministry the churches were not only hindered in their spiritual growth but were open to the destructive tactics of the enemy which we read so much about in the New Testament. I believe if we are honest we will see by revelation of the Spirit that the local eldership of the churches was quickly subverted because of the lack of ministries to guide, teach and pastor the churches. To say that because pastors are not mentioned, except in Ephesians 4:11, that the ministry is non-existent or that it is swallowed up in the ministry of the local elders is to be completely oblivious to the fact that the early church did not fully come into the full divine order that God had ordained. Such was to be a process of development, but the process was cut short and subverted. God knew this would happen and also knew of the subsequent history of the church in a wilderness of confusion and darkness. **But now is the time of restoration**! Should we then expect to suddenly see a "New Testament Church" functioning in perfect divine order? Or must we again expect it to be a process of development

and growth? Cannot we now believe that the same Lord is still Head of His church, and that the same Spirit which revealed His plan in the beginning can guide by revelation in this hour so that we can gradually come into the fullness of that which He desires. The early church never came into the fullness of His perfect plan and order. **This has been reserved for this end time**! Now is the time that we need to be very careful that we do not jump to quick conclusions as if we had all the answers. We need to walk humbly and cautiously before the Lord as He unfolds His divine pattern and as He is actively engaged to develop and bring to fullness His Body in this day. We are now in a transition period and we need much grace, patience, love and openness to the revelation and leading of the Spirit, lest we miss what God is doing and **stop short of the full realization of His divine plan for His church.**

There is much that the Lord is revealing concerning His ministries, and it is very evident that He is in the process of calling and restoring a divinely ordained ministry. Can we not then discern a pattern in this process? We read much about the foundational ministry of apostles in the New Testament and Paul indicates they are the first that are "set" in the church (1 Cor. 12). This is because the church had a pure beginning and could begin at the outset with establishment. But what about now? Are people just barely getting their eyes open to the "Babylonish captivity" they are in ready to be established by apostles? (This is said with reference to the general move of the Spirit of God now among many denominational people and not with reference to some groups who have come out enough to be established by an apostolic ministry.) What we need to see, and I believe it is in perfect harmony with that which the Lord is doing, is that in the process of coming out of Babylon it is the ministry of the prophet that comes first. "Lift up your voice like a trumpet."

In the process of restoring His church in this day God is raising up first prophets (not first in the church, but first in order of time sequence). Jesus, speaking of the time sequence of ministry unto peoples in apostasy, says in Luke 11:49, "There also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute." Note that He mentions prophets are being raised up, but as yet, not very many apostles. We should expect them as more and more people begin to respond to the message of New Testament Christianity, that the Lord will begin to send forth more apostles to establish and set in order His people. We should also expect in this process of development that gradually more evangelists, pastors and teachers, will begin to develop and come into their ministries that the Body of Christ can be brought to the fullness of that which He purposes. For this time there shall be no "cutting short" of the development of the church by apostasy, for this is the time of fulfillment. This is the day when He shall have a "glorious church without spot or wrinkle."

There is so much more that could be written, but I feel constrained to draw this to a close with a few final remarks. The Lord does not want His church to be guided by just the letter of that which we find in the New Testament writings. For we do not find a complete picture therein. **There must be the living revelation of His living word** through an apostolic and prophetic ministry. As to the functions of each of the ministries there is so much yet we have to learn both by revelation and experience. Therefore let us keep our hearts open.

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